

THE STORY OF OUR LIVES FROM YEAR TO YEAR

ALL THE YEAR ROUND

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GERALD.

BY ELEANOR C. PRICE.

CHAPTER XXXI. THE JOURNEY.

A FEW years ago, when Mr. and Mrs. Gerald Fane went up from Cape Town to the Diamond Fields, only two hundred miles of the distance could be travelled by railway, and the whole journey was an affair of about ten days. Of course the railway journey was at first very much like others, except that the train was crowded with noisy, picturesque Malays. These disappeared by degrees, and after passing the Paarl, with its oaks, and vineyards, and long street of old Dutch houses, the travellers found themselves slowly climbing, going deeper and deeper in among the mountains.

They wound in and out between great grey rocks like castles, with here and there a green, soft valley, which would be dark and gloomy, filled with deep blue shadows, as the sun sank lower, and the rocks and hills above were bright with gorgeous colour. Then night seemed to come suddenly, and the moon shone over the wild, weird, lonely mountains with an almost golden splendour, and the train went wriggling in and out of tunnels, turning sharp corners, with narrow valleys far below full of mysterious darkness.

Two days of this scenery, grander and more wonderful than anything Theo had ever seen, seemed like a fit beginning for this journey, which was altogether the most glorious fun that she had ever experienced. All the wild spirit of adventure, which had had no outlet in England, began to find its use and its satisfaction here. The Karoo, the great rocky plain, when they reached it, was not quite so interesting as the mountains—bare, rugged,

stony, with scrub bush and dry sand. Sometimes they passed a group of Kafir huts, with dogs and children sprawling about together, and women washing in the pools of a dry river-bed.

At last, on a moonlight evening, they came to the place where the train stopped finally, and they were still several days' journey from home, as they called it.

"Now I'm afraid the disagreeables will begin," said Gerald, as he took Theo and Combe out of the little wayside station.

"No; you mean the fun," said Theo, with delight in her voice.

"Combe doesn't think so," said Gerald.

And Combe, grasping her bags and baskets, from which she would not be parted, could only groan in answer.

She was tired to death, poor Combe! She could only see the terror and awfulness of the mountains, the desolation of the plain. She was afraid of the Kafirs, and thought the black must come off when they touched anything; the discomfort of the inns, the strangeness of the food, made her feel ill; she was sure that neither she nor her mistress would ever escape alive from this dreadful country. Every mile farther from Cape Town made her more miserable, for Mrs. Forester's servants had given her a terrible account of the Fields. Even the train, that last relic of civilisation, must now be left behind.

If Combe had disliked travelling in Europe, what was that to this tearing on into savage lands, as they seemed to her, with no protection but this wild young man who was now her master?

It was a strange scene; the rough railway-sheds; the encampment close by, with wild, black figures moving round the yellow blaze of fires, or straggling up to the train. There were lights about the railway, a great puffing and whistling, a rolling of

carts that came to take the passengers on their way. Not far off were one or two white houses with lights glimmering, and ox-waggons outspanned in front of them ; but all this was a little oasis of noise and life in the middle of a great stretching plain, over which the moon shone calmly for miles, a world of perfect stillness, scattered over with rough bush and heaps of stones, and bounded by a solemn chain of mountains far away.

The inn was very dirty, very comfortless, not much more than a canteen, so that it was with great difficulty they got a room to themselves ; but they were too happy to care ; they laughed together and made fun of it all. After a very rough supper—but they knew what it was to be hungry, and did not care for that—they went out for a stroll by moonlight on the great plain. It was not actually so flat as it had looked from the railway, and a few hundred yards took them beyond a rising ground, out of sight of houses, station, railway, Kafir huts, and every sign of life ; they were alone together in that silent country, under the African moon and the stars that she made pale.

"I wish it could be all like this. This is worth living for," said Theo, as they wandered slowly on. "Away from all those people—those passengers, what a noise they made ! All day I have been wishing for something like this. Oh, Gerald, it is so nice to have nobody else—you and I, and nobody else in the world."

"You don't think it is a dream, do you ?" said Gerald.

"I don't care what it is. I only know it is perfect. How could you run away to this glorious, beautiful country, and leave me behind ?"

"Sometimes," Gerald said, "when I was coming down to meet you, I used to walk off like this by myself, and wonder if it was possible that I should ever have you with me here. It's very hard to believe it now—now that I've got you. Yes, I think it is rather grand, there is so much more room than in England ; but it is a dreadful country too, Theo, in some ways. Man is vile on this continent, my dear child, that's certain."

"Now I should think it was so easy to be good here," said Theo. "Don't you see, in this great, still world, there is so little between us and the angels. In England there is hardly one bit of desert country to look straight up at the stars. There is no room for anything one doesn't

see. One's thoughts are all tied down—houses, and servants, and crops, and fashions, and all the details that people make such a fuss about. Here they are all nothing. Life is simple, and grand, and perfect. Gerald, I think you and I are most gloriously fortunate. Do you know, it is the sort of thing that I have dreamed about. If only I had Aster, and could ride straight away to those hills ! Look at the hills, Gerald—the white light over there. I think the angels are coming over them now."

"To meet you," said Gerald.

It had indeed a wonderful, spiritual beauty, that vivid glory of night, which seemed to tremble on the hills as if something unearthly was passing over them. Theo gazed away into the distance with dreamy, entranced eyes. Gerald's arm was round her, and he stood looking down into her face while she dreamed and talked in her low, gentle way. Presently he kissed her, breaking the spell suddenly, and bringing her back from the hills and the angels.

"Think of me. I want you," he said.

"What else am I thinking of ?" said Theo.

He made her walk on, and told her about two horses he had seen at the Fields, which he meant to buy as soon as they got there. Theo was very eager about the horses, and talked about nothing else, till, after a long ramble, they came back to the inn, and fellow-passengers, and dirt, and smells ; but, in spite of all this, they could not manage to be miserable.

The next morning they started again on their journey in quite a new way, which delighted Theo more than any experience she had had yet. Gerald had made acquaintance with the chief engineer of the line, who had consented to take them and their luggage on in open trucks, over some miles of railway which was not properly made yet, only laid down in a temporary sort of way for carrying material. Sitting on a plank laid across the truck was not exactly comfortable ; but who, except Combe, could think of comfort under such circumstances ! The wild excitement was positively glorious, of rushing through the air at express speed along a half-made railway-line, with the great open plain stretching all round, and bushes covered with brilliant flowers here and there, and the hills pale blue, shining in the distance. Farther on they went, tearing through a country of more trees, with railway camps here and there, and wild-looking Kafirs in blankets, staring at the train. They had

one long stoppage in the middle of the day, where an engine had gone off the line—no wonder!—and a crowd of Kafirs were working about it lazily, ordered by white men. Gerald and Theo wandered away, and sat down among the rocks a little way off, watching them. Presently she made him come down among the tents and talk to the Kafir women. Some were stalking along with pails of water on their heads, some sitting at the hut-doors, playing with their funny little dark children. They looked up and laughed, and stared at Theo as she walked about among them. They did not understand her, till she tried to comfort one poor thing who was sitting crouched up with a sick baby in her arms. The soft, soothing words of pity, though they were English, seemed to belong somehow to a universal language, and the woman lifted her sad eyes with a sort of gratitude.

After that they climbed into their truck again, and steamed off in a great hurry, for the afternoon was closing in. It was bush country now, dull and lonely, till, by-and-by, it was lighted up with great burning clouds of smoke from bush-fires. Here and there the fires were quite near the line, and dark figures moved about in front of them. As night came on, Gerald made Theo lie down on the floor of the truck, and covered her with rugs, for it was cold; and so through the dusk they went rushing on to the end of their railway journey—a funny little Dutch hotel, with waggons and oxen and mules about it, and railway-works going on, and the bush looking still more dismal under the rising moon. After that long, rattling, tearing day in the open air, they did not want a moonlight walk, and Theo's dreams were not likely to be waking ones. In spite of the room; in spite of the Dutch bed; in spite of the noises in the house, she went to sleep instantly, and slept in perfect peace till three o'clock in the morning.

Then they were roused by the loud blowing of a horn, and half an hour later, after drinking hot coffee in the kitchen, they had scrambled into the cart, and were off—another new kind of travelling. The cart was covered with canvas, and fitted up with five or six seats, one behind the other, all facing the horses. On the box sat the half-caste driver, a wild-looking fellow, who had enough to do to manage his team of eight, some horses and some mules; beside him were two other men, one acting as guard, the other carrying the

long whip, which flew out, crackling and flourishing, at the horses' ears; the luggage was strapped on behind. Gerald had secured the seat behind the box, which was the least cramped, and the easiest to get out of; and so they started in the morning moonlight, dashing along through the bush, jolting, bouncing, plunging, while the three men in front sang together, and the other passengers growled or joked in the background.

That was a curious journey. They outspanned often to change the horses, but very seldom where the passengers could get proper rest and food. It was impossible to sleep in the cart, however tired one might be. If exhaustion made eyelids drop, and brought a momentary forgetfulness, some rut or stone, a tremendous jolt and bump, were sure to wake one up again. Now and then they stopped at a little farm or inn by the wayside, with orange-trees and oleander coming into flower; but here two hours' sleep in some horrid little room was all they had; the horn blew, and the coffee was swallowed scalding, and off they went again over the great desolate plains.

Sometimes they came upon a very picturesque scene—moonlight, perhaps, which made the wide plain look still more boundlessly mysterious, and a Kafir ox-waggon outspanned near the road. All the oxen, with their long horns, lay in a great dark circle; near them a fire was burning; red and yellow flames, and a great waving column of smoke, rose slowly up against the blue, deep sky, and the dark figures of the Kafirs sat round the fire, with their black arms outstretched, singing wild songs to the moon in their soft, melodious voices.

At every outspan Gerald and Theo wandered away from the cart, taking their provisions with them, into the lonely silence of the veldt. These rambles had a charm of their own, which made them look back afterwards on those days of the cart as some of their happiest days. There were not many flowers to be found, for this is a barren country—ice-plants, and iris, and among the bush a shrub with bright red flowers, a sort of azalea; most of the wealth and luxury of wild flowers had been left behind near Cape Town.

One evening, when it was getting dark—it is dark very early there—they had a long, delightful rest near a pool, with frogs ringing their bells, and crickets keeping up a wonderful concert in the bushes. They had a rug with them, and a heap of stones to lean against, and presently Gerald

went to sleep there in the twilight, and Theo sat dreaming and thinking about last year, and London, and her grandmother, and the wonderful way in which her life had changed, so that now she was married, and in Africa, and—she told herself as she turned her head a little, and looked at Gerald—the happiest woman in the world.

The most civilised place they stopped at in this journey was Beaufort, where there really was a little refreshing rest to be had, though only from late in the evening till two in the morning; but it comforted poor Combe, especially, to see gardens and trees once more, and to hear the sound of running water. Then on again, and away over the bare country. Outspans were very frequent, for the team was poor and the road was bad; but though these were waste of time, and generally happened where there was no chance of food or sleep, they were the hours of the day that Gerald and Theo enjoyed most. Their companions in the cart were of a rough kind—Dutch, Germans, Jews, men and women going like themselves to the Fields, and, like themselves, human beings—but this was the only point of contact. It was always a relief to get away from their grumblings and their coarse jokes, only less repulsive than their politeness.

One night there really was an adventure. They had been getting on very slowly all day, had had only one meal, and when night fell they were still some miles short of the farm where they hoped for supper and a few hours' rest. The cart came to a standstill in the middle of the veldt; the horses were taken out and fed for the night, for they could go no farther, and the passengers were informed that they must sleep in the cart or nowhere. Combe resigned herself to her fate; she had made a little friendship with a fat German woman, who was a stranger and unhappy, like herself. Wedged in between this woman and the side of the cart, Combe had reached such a pitch of resignation that she was fairly contented. Her master and mistress had wandered away by themselves, as their manner was. It might be necessary to come back presently and sleep in the cart, but a little peace and fresh air and loneliness must be had first, so they went off together in the moonlight with rugs and biscuits, to look for these in the great blue plain. They sat down under the shelter of a bush. Far off they could see the fire that the driver and his friends

had lighted, where they were boiling their kettle; the voices, and the crackling of the wood, came softened by distance through the quiet air.

"I want to stay here all night, Gerald," said Theo. "We can't go back to the cart; those Jew men are too horrid."

"What, here, out of doors?" said Gerald. "No, I can't let you. It will be too cold."

"But do you know that all my life I have longed to sleep out of doors? And I may never have another opportunity. Before I left London, I told Hugh how much I should like it, and he was shocked—but he is so very civilised, dear old fellow! Soldiers must do those things, though."

"They don't like it, and they don't think it proper for ladies," said Gerald. "There are very few people like you, besides, thoroughly right-down romantic—liking the real thing as much as the idea. The way you have gone through this journey is wonderful to me. Yes, Captain North would never— But you are not miserable, after all?"

"How silly you are!" said Theo softly.

She knew that there was always a little bitterness in Gerald's thoughts of Hugh. It was not to be wondered at, perhaps; but Theo meant it to be driven quite away in time. These two should be friends some day, she was resolved; at present that end seemed a long way off.

"I will not spend the night in that cart," she said. "But to satisfy you, dear—I see a house."

She had been gazing for some minutes across the plain, which was like an enchanted vision, lit up with the glory of the moon. Not very far off there seemed to be a dip in the ground, and beyond that there were trees, and certainly among them there was a faint white glimmer, where walls and windows might be. Theo stood up, and shading her eyes with her hand, as if in the sunshine, looked long and earnestly at this oasis in the plain.

"Yes, it is a house," she said. "Come, let us go and ask them to take us in."

"I don't know what to make of it," said Gerald. "If it was a likely place at all, we should have outspanned there. I'll go and ask Tom the meaning of it."

"No, no; let us go and knock at the door," said Theo; so Gerald threw the rugs over his arm, and they set off across the veldt. It was a rough, scrambling walk; they had to cross a slit—a dry river-bed—among heaps of stones, and then to climb up its steep bank on the other side; and then

they were soon close upon the trees and the house, a poor-looking little building, with one or two sheds about it, all very bare, with an iron roof that glittered in the moonlight, and blue gum-trees and orange-trees growing by the door. All was very still; there was not a sound of life, not an animal about the place, except a dog that barked and growled inside when Gerald knocked at the door. He knocked for some minutes perseveringly, for he thought that even the floor of a room would be better for Theo than the cramped cart, or the open veldt at this time of the year.

"What do you want?" said a man's voice suddenly, inside the door.

It was a pleasant voice, with a good English accent.

"I want a night's lodging for my wife and myself, if you can kindly give it us," said Gerald.

"Where do you come from, and where are you going?"

"From Cape Town, and we are going to Kimberley. We have outspanned down there across the slit, and the cart is a bad place to sleep in. You are an Englishman; you will help us, won't you?"

"Sleep out in the veldt; better people than you have done it," said the man more roughly.

"It's rather cold," said Gerald. He looked laughingly at Theo; it was impossible to help it; they were so like beggars at this inhospitable door.

"Go and be stifled, or go and be frozen, whichever you please!" said the man. "I won't forward you on your road to Kimberley. Do you know what will happen to you there?"

"What do you suppose will happen to us?" said Gerald.

"You will lose everything you have, your children will die, your wife will take to drinking, you will follow her example, and by-and-by she will sober you by going out of her mind. Don't say you have had no warning."

He raised his voice, so that it rang out angrily. The effect of the words was strange and awful in that lonely place, where they could not see the speaker, and everything round them was silent and still. It was like one of those terrible voices that used to be heard in the desert, as legends tell us—voices of evil spirits, driving lonely travellers mad with fright. Gerald and Theo stood there in the shadows, while the moon shone, and the

mountains glimmered, bounding the vast plain far away. They looked at each other, and both had turned a little pale. Then suddenly, inside the house, a woman screamed violently once, and began to sob and moan. They heard the man with slow and heavy steps go away from the door.

"Come away," said Gerald, laying his hand on Theo's arm.

This certainly was not the place for a night's rest. They hardly spoke till they had left the dark little group of trees and buildings behind them, and crossed the slit, and were out again on the wide veldt, where they could see the fire burning, and the horses moving about in the moonlight, and the long canvas cover of the cart, which suddenly looked like home.

The cheerful blaze of that fire was very attractive; there sat their wild, good-humoured driver with his friends, still boiling the kettle, in a yellow glow of light which made the moon look pale. Most of the passengers had stowed themselves away in the cart; they were all in their right minds, as far as they had any. Gerald and Theo sat down near the fire, and Gerald began asking questions about the farm they had just visited. The men laughed at the notion of asking for anything there. They said that the people who lived there were English, and had ruined themselves at the Diamond Fields. The man had told his own story, as Theo had at once guessed. His wife was raving mad now, and constantly trying to destroy herself; he kept her there, alone in that house, and never allowed anyone to come in. As Theo listened, sad and silent, to Gerald's talk with the men, a sort of terror stole over her for the first time; she felt the awfulness of this great country, where evil was so strong and human beings were so helpless and weak.

Presently, as she sat dreaming there, leaning against a stone, Gerald laid a rug over her to keep her from the cold. And then the men began to sing a wild, melancholy song with a chorus, which went on through many verses. And then she knew that Gerald was wrapping the rug more warmly round her; and she half opened her eyes, and saw the yellow flames flickering, and was conscious of a great blue roof, with a light in it, and she fancied that she saw two great white misty wings floating, even higher than that, and she murmured to herself, so that the words just reached Gerald's ear, "God is strong."

And then, strangely enough, she was in London, in her grandmother's house once

more, with the lamp burning dimly ; and she was telling her grandmother about Gerald ; and Lady Redcliff kissed her, which was a wonderful thing, and said, " My pretty Theo ! " in her kindest voice ; and Theo laid her head against her knees, but they were very hard.

And so they camped out that night, and she slept still and peacefully with her head on a stone, and Gerald sat all through the hours watching her, till the fire was nearly out, and they were all roused to bustle and confusion in the chill of the early morning.

As they started off for the Fields, with a great blowing of horns, and kicking, and plunging, dashing recklessly down into the sluit, and up the other side, Gerald and Theo looked at that Englishman's lonely house—they passed quite near it now.

" Poor things ! " Theo whispered to Gerald. " I wish we could have gone in and comforted them."

He looked at her and smiled ; it was a woman's wish ; and he knew, better than she did, how common such stories were in Africa. She would, indeed, find many to be comforted.

A CRUISE IN THE MOZAMBIQUE.

IN THREE PARTS. PART III.

My interview with the Queens of Johanna had lasted some considerable time, and conversation had begun to flag when the King and my husband returned to the harem. Sherbet was then brought, which I tasted, but could not drink, it was so mawkishly sweet. A slave then entered in a painfully cringing attitude, bearing a shawl on a salver, which was presented to me kneeling, the King saying the Queen begged I would accept it to lay upon my bed, also a bottle of attar-of-roses. The King promised, should the night be fine and no men allowed to be on deck, to bring his three wives on board the ship to see me, about ten o'clock.

Arrangements were accordingly made for Seydi to receive them at the gangway from the King's own boat. Lanterns were placed all along the deck, right and left, to the after hatchway, a screen was rigged across the deck, abreast of the mainmast, to keep off prying eyes, and refreshments provided, when it came on to pour with rain, preventing their coming, and we were obliged to sail next day for Douany. Notwithstanding the length of my visit, they were most unwilling to part with me,

and looked wistfully into my face as I took an affectionate leave. They were all very young, the eldest certainly not over twenty, and I thought their husband was proud and fond of them, treating them like spoiled darlings, but not as reasoning creatures. The King himself was extremely intelligent and enlightened, and ever a staunch ally to the English. They could all read the Koran, but had no other book, nor did they seem to wish for any. We then paid a visit to Prince Abdullah, who also enquired much for Lady Grey, and as to the health of a curious parrot with which he had presented her. I was sorry not to be able to satisfy him on the latter point. I was also here presented with a bottle of attar. Seydi now took possession, and convoyed us out of the labyrinth till we came in sight of the roadstead, into which the Ariel, fresh from England, was standing. " Plenty pirate now, Lyra outside, Shaitan (Devil) on board," remarked Seydi in the most significant tone, alluding to some of the late proceedings of that remarkable little vessel. Having made this cutting remark, he salaamed himself away, and left us to the enjoyment, I was going to say, of a walk up the hill. But we were closely accompanied by hordes of boys (it was the nearest thing to being hooted out of the town) ; they whooped, screamed, jabbered, and flung up their arms at me, till I hoped they might soon be exhausted. Not at all ; their energies continued unabated long after we had embarked in the galley.

No history of a cruise in the Mozambique would be complete without much mention of the Lyra and her captain. He was an old and valued friend, now dead, worn to the grave by his superhuman energies long before his time. Never has there been before or since so successful a slaver and dhow catcher. The slave trade was paralysed during the latter part of the Lyra's time, and has never revived to its former activity. Her captain was popularly supposed to be made of indiarubber ; he neither ate, slept, nor rested, nor did he suffer anyone else to do so. On many occasions every boat, officer, and man were away cruising, leaving himself, a quartermaster, an engineer, and the dinghy with one boy alone on board. He slept in a chair on deck for an hour in the twenty-four, or took a snooze in the hammock-nettings for five minutes. The ship had been on shore more times than anybody could count during

her researches into unknown little dhow harbours, and I believe her bottom was a perfect sight when she came to be docked on her arrival in England. But a great number of slaves were liberated, and a very large sum of prize-money made. The natives early called him "Shaitan," and feared him accordingly. He told me himself with chuckling delight what happened when the Ariel arrived on the station to relieve the Lyra. There was intense excitement and delight among the slave-drivers, and at the barracoons ; they had got rid at last of this Shaitan, who had harried them for long years, divined their vile plans, and invariably outwitted them (no mean triumph) ; and as the ship sailed away, bound to the Cape, beacon-fires were flashed from hill-top to mountain-side, along hundreds of miles of African coast, signifying to all whom it might concern that the scourge was gone. Next morning they were more convinced than ever that it was the devil in person, for there was the dreaded Shaitan, whom they had seen sailing away in his ship, now landing from the Ariel ! The explanation of it was that he had exchanged with her captain, who had gone home in the Lyra in his place.

Early in the morning, before going to sea, we landed at the watering-place, where a seemingly sparkling stream tumbled down a little declivity. I only hoped the ship's clothes had not been washed in that stream nearer its source ! Climbing a long green slope to the very highest point above the town, we sat down for shelter from the rain in the long stiff grass under an umbrella. As I was wet through by this time, we took a nearer way down a sort of ladder, cut in the face of the mountain, till, reaching the bottom, we were taken possession of as before, and conducted to the shore. Not liking to wait for our boat on account of being so wet, we chartered a canoe to take us off. A—— and I, with two men, one of whom sat on the very end of the outrigger to keep our balance, made it rather a tight squeeze. I felt afraid to wink, or blow my nose, for fear of capsizing.

It was rather a ridiculous sight, when one of our cutters going on shore for the officers passed us, to see them toss their oars to a soaked and draggled individual paddling in a canoe. Getting out of it was a ticklish matter, the ship was light and well out of water ; however, I clambered up, to be received with an expression of kind anxiety by the doctor, and unlimited

proposals of quinine, etc. However, no ill effects came from that wetting. The Queen sent me word that she was more than sorry it had been too wet for them to come, but hoped to pay us a visit when next we came in. That time never arrived. She sent me a large, flat, scented flower, smelling of lotus and stephanotis, which she had woven together for perfuming my drawers. The scent in our cabin was so unbearably powerful, however, that after four days' endurance, I was obliged to consign it to the deep.

It would be pleasant cruising for a yacht between these islands, all being safe of approach, with clear passages between. Mohilla was our next anchorage, bringing up opposite the brown, dull-looking little town of Douany. A remarkably long, narrow building, looking like casemated barracks, occupies the central position ; it is, however, the Queen's palace and mosque. A large canoe, with a red and blue flag in the bows, was soon seen coming off to us with a message from the Queen ; "She had a salute ready, and was anxious to see me ; she was glad to hear I had come." A state visit was paid to her majesty by my husband and the consul alone, the first day, to arrange slave-trade affairs, which had been somewhat "disorganised" of late. At four I landed. Mohilla is the smallest and lowest of the Comoros, about nineteen hundred feet high, and cultivated up to the very tops of the hills. The landing is in a cove ; at low water boats cannot come within two hundred and fifty yards of the shore, the beach is so flat. Crowds of people met us, all gaping and laughing—at me, apparently. We were conducted into the town by Drayman Cham, a Mohilla chief, through a small door in the wall, which, like at Johanna, surrounds the town. In the courtyard of the Queen's palace stood a company of Mohilla soldiers with flint matchlocks and spears. The word of command was shouted in English, and they presented arms as we passed by in quite a civilised manner, evidently learned from the French, who have long had an eye to the undivided possession of Mohilla. We were taken through a long, narrow, bare room, and up some steps like those of a hayloft, with a trap-door at the top. At the farther end of a narrow chamber, similar to the one below, stood the Queen, surrounded by chiefs and crouching slaves. We sat, one on each side of her, with several naval officers, and rows of great men on chairs, all down the room. The Queen is

short, with pretty, gazelle-like eyes and white teeth; judging by her hands she was of a very light colour, but she wore a kind of yashmack, or black and gold embroidered face-cover, and was enveloped in a heavy gold and silver shawl, like a bundle of clothes. She spoke French well, but after saying she was pleased to see me, and making a few enquiries, she relapsed into a state of dignified repose, and only spoke in reply to our conversation. She is a niece of Radama the First, a former and very powerful king of Madagascar, and is supposed to be an independent queen, but the French governor of the neighbouring island of Mayotta has always had a great deal to say on all state matters connected with Mohilla. The Queen told me that she had a French governess for ten years, with whom she lived entirely, I think at Réunion. She is married to a high-caste Zanzibar Arab, who was at that time under a temporary cloud—whether political, social, or marital did not appear, but was soon to be brought back again to his spouse. She had two children, cheerless-looking little bodies, whose aged though baby faces looked strangely wanting in the fun and spirits of childhood; besides, they were so swathed in stiff clothes that I doubt if they could run about comfortably. Much of her majesty's conversation was about her coffee and spice gardens, which she wished us to see. She had great natural dignity, and quite gave one the idea of having been born in the purple. We then took a ceremonious leave, and with a soldier marching before and one behind us, went out into the country, under groves of cocoanut and spice trees, to the gardens. Our guard wore caps like a bishop's mitre, of ancient Egyptian pattern, I have since learned, with the crescent and star in red, and coats of red baize, tied in at the waist with a white girdle; a spear and shield completed their costume, the latter not wholly unnecessary, inasmuch as no sort of garment clothed their athletic black limbs. Drayman Cham here again met us, to offer coffee and cakes, served in a sort of summer-house. I asked why the Queen did not remove her yashmack on receiving me? "Because she got plenty pimple on her nose," was the reply. It was for this ailment, I suppose, that she requested that our surgeon might visit and prescribe for her, which he did, to our great surprise, but we supposed that so long a residence among the French must have emancipated

her from many foolish Moslem prejudices. At night a bullock came off as a present to the ship, also a quantity of cocoanuts, always a treat to the men.

Comoro, the largest island of the group, was our next place of call. Coasting along, Seydi Drayman, who was still on board, named the villages and points to me, also anything remarkable connected with them. Passing the south-west point of Comoro by daylight, we had no chance of seeing the sulphureous vapours which issue from volcanic cracks in the ground. Passing ships often take them for the lights of a vessel closer in shore. We passed quite near a projecting black point of scoriaceous lava, which was formed by the eruption of 1858, and was not in the charts. It seemed so curious to make discoveries in a new and unsurveyed world. "Plenty devil here," remarked Seydi in his brusque way. "What are they like?" enquired my husband. "Good-looking fellows?" "Oh, you English no believe devil," said he with impatience. "But I speakee for true. Suppose you pass Comoro at night in dhow, you see thousand lights on shore, now here, now far away. Plenty devil. You no believe? When man fall down, you say he got a fit. Dat not true. Devil strike him; he fall down. My mother slave, walk along at night; a great strong devil lie across the path; they fight; slave throw devil down and keep him down till day. When peoples come by they find slave on his face, his hands buried in the ground. Devil gone. That for true!" "Oh yes, Seydi," said my husband; "that happens very often in our country, too. Men found on their faces, having seen devil. Too much rum." Seydi turned away with a gesture of annoyance at our incredulity.

Passing the cheerless, brown-looking town of Itzando, we steamed gingerly into Maroni, the consul ahead in the cutter to pilot us. The whole island is nearly steep-to; large ships could brush the trees on shore with their yards without touching the bottom. We picked out a berth as close to the iron-bound shores as it seemed advisable to go, and even then we had to let go the anchor in twenty-five fathoms. I thought the cable would never finish running out. My husband and the consul went to palaver with the Sultan Amadi, of Maroni, on the subject of the slave-trade, while Lieutenant A. went with me to see the town.

An individual with a long wand, in semi-soldierly attire, was told off to show

me the sights, and two soldiers marched behind and before us. The wand was not at all unnecessary, for the inhabitants of this place had never before seen a white woman, and were exceedingly anxious to prove by touch whether I was of the same flesh and blood as themselves. Mr. A. and I agreed that their gestures, and indeed, almost horror, at my appearance, were far from being complimentary. As we walked through the little, narrow, dirty lanes, comprising the great thoroughfares, we were yelled, hooted, and screamed at in the most friendly way by hundreds of men, women, and children. The women came to the doors of their houses, caught sight of me, and fled with a scream of astonishment. We were taken into two harems, to visit our guide's relations, and I was assured they considered I was not so bad as might have been expected. The women in this town seemed to have far more freedom—I suppose owing to a plentiful admixture of Malagasy blood and less of the Arab—than in the other towns we visited. Seydi was a great potentate here, and a haughtiness came into his demeanour, previously unknown; crowds of people kissed his hand, which he held out to them in a magnificent manner, tempered with deepest scorn. A convention was also made with the chief of Itzanda and an unsuccessful attempt to restore peace between the two towns, Itzanda and Maroni, who were at deadly feud, battles being fought, and many people killed, at the very slightest provocation. They are particularly clever in the Oriental habit of lying, and were profuse in their innocence of slaving practices, in the face of two poor slaves having swam off to the ship about ten p.m., naked, scored with lashes, and quite exhausted. They had escaped from the dhow lying on the beach inside the little creek, which had been represented to us as an island trader; but which turned out to have landed a cargo of slaves from the African main at Maroni three days before our arrival.

The peak of Comoro is most remarkable, smooth, and dome-shaped, with so few undulations that it is difficult to believe it is eight thousand feet in height; it shows better about fifty miles off, but we saw it remarkably clearly defined, quite a hundred miles distant. It is the highest mountain in the world as compared with the size of the island, which is only about thirty miles by twelve. Eruptions fre-

quently occur; in 1858 the lava poured in a gigantic broad black flood, carrying everything before it, mid-way between the two belligerent towns, situated only three miles apart, frightening the respective inhabitants nearly out of their wits. Comoro is sometimes called Angezecha. Its interior is wholly unexplored and unknown, principally owing to its possessing absolutely no harbour, and not even a decent anchorage. We brought up in twenty-five fathoms, one and a half cable from the rocks, with only just room to swing, and the bottom was very foul. Comoro is, besides, far less fertile, owing to being actively volcanic, than the other islands; the peak is quite bare of vegetation. The native government is split up into many districts, each possessing an independent sultan. The result appears to be a state of perpetual war, and its natural outcome, poverty and decay. The inhabitants are a fine race, of remarkable stature, resembling the Hovas of Madagascar, with whom they are connected by an intermixture of blood. Water is exceedingly scarce and bad, cattle cheap and plentiful.

We steamed from Comoro to Mayotta, the currents in light winds being so extraordinarily strong as to set you miles away from where you are supposed to be by the reckoning. A French man-of-war arrived at Johanna, which had been swept away in a calm, and carried completely round Mohilla, taking six days about it. Mayotta, the fourth island of this group, is surrounded by a reef, in many places ten or eleven miles from the main island. It is approached through a bewildering labyrinth of winding passages between the reefs, but is excellently buoyed. The island is very uneven, with quantities of sugarloaf peaks of volcanic origin. It is now a French colony, a small force of sailors and soldiers being maintained at Zaudzi. The population vastly exceeds that of the other islands, numbering with slaves eight thousand people, and, also unlike the others, it is very unhealthy, mainly owing to mangrove swamps. The French people compare it to Senegal. The circle of reefs round Mayotta have at least fourteen passages through them; in calm weather the coral patches are only to be seen by the discolouration of the water, and the currents being so strong, unless a bright look-out is kept, you drift upon them before any danger is suspected. It was on one of these outlying reefs that H.M.S. Enchantress, formerly the celebrated

slaver Manuela, prize to the *Brisk*, was lost, three months before our arrival. After being condemned she was bought into the Navy as a store-ship, and lost on her first tour of service, because she sailed so fast that it was thought impossible she could have run the distance, when she struck heavily eleven miles from the shore, to all appearance far out in the open sea, and became a total wreck. The French saved her sails and some valuables, which we shipped on our arrival. Mayotta numbers several islands; Zambourou, Pamanzi, and Zaudzi being the most important. On the north end of Pamanzi there is a remarkable lake of great depth, the crater, apparently, of an extinct volcano. The French establishment on Zaudzi comprises a governor and various officials, who live in capital solid houses. Slave labour is cheap. We were received with much kindness and hospitality by the governor, a kindly little yellow man in spectacles and a blue dressing-gown, who had worn out both vigour and digestion in the colonial service of France; that did not, however, prevent his giving us an excellent French breakfast of eighteen courses, very little of which he touched himself. We were to have gone to the important French settlement of Nos Beh, Madagascar, on leaving Mayotta, but time did not allow of it, to our great regret, as it is here in particular the French have established themselves, spreading out their grasp on Madagascar, north and south, from their stronghold on this most valuable little island; so we ran through the great Zambourou channel, and so out into the open sea, bound for the Cape.

Before leaving Pomony, we took on board a little Johanna cow, with a hump, and its calf, in the vain hope of milk for breakfast. But the middle watch is long. What are the midshipmen to do with themselves all night in fine weather, save to milk the cow? The men also had a fine frolic on deck, haymaking and airing the cow's provender. The hump of these little Brahminy cattle is the delicacy, and, when salted and pressed, is remarkably good.

When nearing the African coast on our way south, great excitement was caused off Memba Bay by the appearance of a brig-rigged vessel right ahead. Visions of another glorious prize to be captured glowed before our eyes, causing every nerve to be strained in hopes of gaining upon her; and gain upon her we certainly did, but only, slowly and unwillingly, to discover, as our chase lifted out of the sea,

that she was a white detached rock, so exactly the shape of a brig under sail, slightly heeling over, as to deceive the most experienced eye for several hours.

It was a glorious anniversary with the ship, and we hoped history was about to repeat itself. On the same day in the previous August, when on passage from the Cape, about sixty miles from Johanna, the *Brisk* sighted a sail ahead about eleven o'clock in the morning. She was afterwards lost sight of for a couple of hours in the noonday haze, though sailing and steaming hard directly for her. She was again made out on the weather bow, having altered her course. Going full speed ahead, she was slowly come up with, and made out to be a clipper ship, a low, black, rakish hull, with a great deal of sheer, and a perfect crowd of studding-sails and stay-sails on every available place. The chase kept bearing away, in hopes of escaping by outsailing us, that being her best point. Sir Henry Keppel, whose flag was flying at the mizen, spent the best part of the day in the rigging with his telescope, regardless of the blazing sun, excited as a boy, and charmed beyond measure at such a splendid piece of luck. Speke and Grant, the celebrated travellers, who were also on board, en route for Zanzibar, shared in the general enthusiasm. After chasing her all the long summer's day, till the engine-room was nearly red-hot, and the poor stokers had to be supported up the engine-room hatchway in a fainting state, the *Brisk* ran up alongside her at sundown, and, firing a gun to heave her to, a couple of boats, well-armed, Lieutenant Adeane in command, dropped on board and took possession. Just before boarding, her crew were observed to heave something heavy overboard—afterwards found to have been her logs and colours. She had a cargo of no fewer than eight hundred and forty-six slaves on board, and no papers or colours to produce. Her name was the *Manuela*, formerly *Sunny South*, a Rio packet. Her hull resembled that of the celebrated yacht *America* on a large scale, and her sails were of beautiful snow-white cotton. The slaves had only been shipped a couple of days before, between Cape Delgado and Ibo, and she thought she was safely off, bound to Cuba. She had a captain, three mates, a doctor, pilot, carpenter, boatswain, and forty men, of most ruffianly appearance, chiefly Spaniards and Manilla men. Her captain was of the type

depicted by Marryat — wily, intelligent, suave, with the heart of a Judas. He presented his sword to his captor with an elegant bow, like a hero of old, who, having fought well till the ship was riddled and sinking, gave in to superior strength, and considered himself in the interesting light of an unfortunate but conquered foe. Altogether, it was slavery on a magnificent scale quite unknown in these waters. She was the largest slaver ever taken in the Mozambique Channel, measuring seven hundred and two tons.

The Manuela was taken into Pomony, till her prize-crew were on board, and the necessary arrangements and disposition of her crew made. The captain and mates were taken on board the Brisk, for fear of plots for recapture, and the crew put in irons. The slaves were healthy, but the stench from them intolerable, notwithstanding that the slave-deck was seven feet high, and remarkably well ventilated. When quietly at anchor in Pomony, the slaves were all got up from below, one by one, to count them and describe their sex, and when all were on deck, huddled together like sheep in a great black mass, the prize crew set to work to clean the slave-deck. Several of the officers and men were sick while at work, so utterly horrible was the odour. Being already watered and provisioned for one hundred and five days, millet-seed being the staple food, she was soon off for Mauritius, where the slaves were first landed on Flat Island, the quarantine-ground, and then hired out to sugar-planters. Six months after, when she came to the Cape, I visited her. Though every exertion had been made to disinfect and cleanse her, the smell of the slaves remained nearly as pungent as when they were on board. The vessel was lost, as previously mentioned, on the Mayotta reef. The Manuela's capture by the Brisk was a bitter disappointment to the Lyra, who had, by almost supernatural aid, learned all about the expected arrival of a magnificent slaver; she had hovered off the coast on watch for weeks, only to see her snapped up by the Brisk, who fell in with her quite by chance, while making a passage. The prize-money paid was very large.

Continuing our voyage to the Cape, five dhows were seen in the morning; one of them ran in behind the islands near Memba Bay, which looked suspiciously like trying to evade us, the other four remaining in line of battle, as valiantly as possible, con-

scious of their (present) innocence. When boarded they were full of rice, and had Colonel Rigby's pass, so we were compelled to let them go. A Mozambique dhow is the most unseaworthy craft conceivable; they have high sterns and curious sharp bows, with one large sail on a yard. As a rule they can neither beat nor stay, but they run up and down with the prevailing monsoon, and so manage to make some sort of a passage. One dark night a large vessel was reported right ahead. She suddenly disappeared in the gloom, and may have been a slaver, but she was put down as the Flying Dutchman, bringing us bad weather. Passing close to Barrow Hill, Inhambane, I thought I had never seen so bleak, inhospitable, and desolate a spot, and wondered why such a place should remain, for long years, a bone of contention between the English and Portuguese. From St. John's Gates to the Cape we had nothing but hard gales; so when, after an absence of six months, we took up our moorings in Simon's Bay, I had indeed reached the haven where I would be.

TOGETHER.

THE winter wind is wailing, sad and low,
Across the lake and through the rustling sedge ;
The splendour of the golden after-glow,
Gleams through the blackness of the great yew hedge ;

And this I read on earth and in the sky—
"We ought to be together, you and I."

Rapt through its rosy changes into dark,
Fades all the west ; and through the shadowy trees,

And in the silent uplands of the park,
Creeps the soft sighing of the rising breeze ;
It does but echo to my weary sigh,
"We ought to be together, you and I."

My hand is lonely for your clasping, dear,
My ear is tired, waiting for your call ;
I want your strength to help, your laugh to cheer,
Heart, soul, and senses need you, one and all.
I droop without your full frank sympathy—
We ought to be together, you and I.

We want each other so, to comprehend
The dream, the hope, things planned, or seen, or wrought ;
Companion, comforter, and guide, and friend,
As much as love asks love, does thought need thought.
Life is so short, so fast the lone hours fly—
We ought to be together, you and I.

MARDON HALL.

A STORY IN THREE CHAPTERS. CHAPTER II.

ONE day Mr. Dallas said to me, when he had come into the garden from his painting :

"Nancy, I am going to ask you a great favour. I wonder what your answer will be."

"It will be 'Yes,'" I said, looking down

at him from my step-ladder, on which I stood training a white clematis against a trellis.

"You are very kind," he said, "to promise blindfold. I am going to ask you to let me put you into a picture."

"Me, Mr. Dallas!" I cried, dropping my bundle of matting and my scissors. "You want to paint me! And why?"

"And why not?" he asked, handing me back the things I had let fall. "Why do you exclaim so?"

But I could only ejaculate, while I felt a crimson flush spread from the roots of my hair to my collar:

"Paint me, Mr. Dallas! But it isn't worth your while!"

"Well," he answered, looking straight at me, as if to see what I really felt, "if you had rather not, we will say no more about it; but I think it is very well worth my while. You see now," he went on, laughing, "what it is to promise before knowing what you commit yourself to."

I split a bit of matting, and split it again and again, till it was frayed to a mere thread, and then I said:

"I didn't mean to say I had any objection; I only meant that I should make a very ugly picture."

He laughed.

"I'll answer for the picture," he said, "if you don't mind giving me two or three sittings. Think it over, and tell me this evening," he added, as he turned away.

Then a sudden idea seemed to strike him, and he came back from the doorway to say:

"I wish to paint you just as you are now, in that blue dress, with your hair all rough—not brushed down as you have it in the house."

Then he went back to his work, and I, although my clematis was sadly in want of my attention, came down from my ladder with a spring, and in two minutes I was in my little bedroom, with the door locked behind me. I heard Aunt Libby's voice from below, crying:

"Gracious me, child! Nancy, what's the matter? Can't you learn to go quietly? You give me quite a turn the way you tear about."

But I didn't answer. I was before the little square of wavy mirror, which gave me such uncertain information about the parting of my hair and the set of my collars, with my elbows on the chest-of-drawers, and my face between my hands, my thumbs meeting under my chin, looking

hard at my own distorted image, and saying in a happy whisper to myself:

"He wants to paint me—me! What am I like that made him think of it—to paint me?"

It seemed incredible that there could be anything in my looks or figure to have given him the idea; and yet there must be some charm that no one had noticed before, for he was not easy to please about women's faces. He had shown me some rough sketches of heads, and they had all been very beautiful; surely I wasn't like one of those. "But anyway," I mused as I still stood looking at myself, "he has added me to the number of the people he thinks worth spending his time over." That was a distinction which my wildest castle-building in the air would never have ventured on.

I seemed when I came down to supper that evening—with my hair untouched, since he had found it better so—as if I were treading on air, and as if life were full of new, glad surprises.

"Well, Nancy," said Mr. Dallas, "to be or not to be—I mean your picture?"

"Oh, sir," I said, my voice almost failing me with delight, "if you want to paint a picture of me, I'm sure you're more than welcome to try."

Which seemed to me rather an awkward way of expressing myself, but for all that was the best I could do.

When Aunt Libby saw my uncombed locks and morning frock, she said with some severity, to show me that even the presence of a stranger could not screen such untidiness from blame:

"Well, Nancy, considering the time you have been upstairs, you might have made yourself a little more fit to be seen; your hair looks as if it hadn't seen a comb since first thing this morning."

I scarcely slept at all that night. The thought of sitting or standing for Mr. Dallas to draw me, and then paint me, kept me wide awake until the pale light began to stream in through my little window, and the clock in the kitchen below my room struck four. Then I got up softly and dressed, and stole downstairs and out of doors. I wanted to look at the place which Mr. Dallas had told me he had thought of for the scene of my picture. I was to be standing at the bottom of the terrace-steps, coming to the garden with my head half turned as if someone had just called me from under the yew-trees that grew along the terrace. I stood for a few minutes

practising myself, as it were, and then I sat down. The dew lay thick upon the grass and flowers, and on the jessamine that climbed round the stone balustrade—each dewdrop sparkled like a diamond in the sunbeams that peeped through the elm-trees, while in the shadows the ground looked as if a silver gauze were spread over it. The birds were awake and had begun to sing, and the bees had got to work in the limes and among the roses.

When I had sat on the steps for about half an hour, the fresh morning air, after my wakeful night, overcame me, and I sank into a deep sleep. When I woke, the sun, instead of peeping at me from between the elms, stood high in the sky, the dew was all dried off, and the birds were only twittering.

The umbrella belonging to Mr. Dallas's easel was propped up on the steps to shelter me from the heat, and he himself was standing not far off with a sketch-book in his hand.

"Why, Nancy," he said, as I awoke and exclaimed at finding I had slept so long, "they all thought you were lost, and your aunt has been in despair; but I guessed you would be in the garden, and I have been making my first study of you without your knowing anything of it. Are you angry with me for having stolen a march on you?"

I was so bewildered that I never thought of thanking him for the umbrella. I sat up, rubbed my eyes, put on my hat, which had fallen off, and said :

"Will you show me what you have drawn, sir, please?"

When he gave it me I quite screamed with delight. I looked so different from my reflection in the wavy mirror, and so different from anything I had ever fancied myself to be.

"You like it?" he asked.

"I should think I did!" I exclaimed; "but I shouldn't have known it was me."

"It is not always given to us," he answered, "to see ourselves as others see us; only the general error is the reverse of yours."

"I don't understand you, sir," I said, looking hard at him to catch his meaning.

"Never mind, Nancy," he said, smiling, as he often did when his words puzzled me; "never mind understanding me, but go in and get some breakfast, or you'll have no strength to stand on these steps for an hour this afternoon."

"Shall you begin to-day, sir?" I asked.

"Yes, yes," he answered; "make hay while the sun shines, and paint portraits, too, if it happens to be your substitute for haymaking."

And so my picture was begun. I was so proud of being considered worth painting that I forgot to feel tired by standing so long in one attitude, and I was quite annoyed when the bell called me for the first time that day to go and show the house.

"I'm so sorry," I said apologetically; "but, you see, I must go."

"Never mind," said Mr. Dallas; "you couldn't have stood much longer, so we are only interrupted a few minutes sooner."

"Oh yes, I could have gone on," I answered confidently; "I could have stood there another hour or two."

"You think so," he said, as he walked with me across the courtyard; "but I shouldn't like you to have done such a hard afternoon's work for me."

For him! That was just what would have made it quite easy—quite pleasant for me. How I wished he knew what a delight it was to me to do the smallest thing at his desire!

I found two ladies waiting to see the house. They were so much alike that I saw at a glance they were sisters. Both were handsome and distinguished-looking, but the younger was much the more striking of the two. She was very tall and noble in appearance. No one could fail to notice the grace of her movements at first sight even. I can see her still, if I close my eyes and look back into my old memories, as plainly as if I had had a picture of her to look at all these years, since the day I first saw her at Mardon. Her head was small and beautifully set on her slender neck. I could see masses of golden hair under her broad hat with its long, sweeping feathers, and little, dancing curls peeped out on her temples and about her delicate ears. Her eyebrows and eyelashes were much darker than her hair, which gave still more depth to her lustrous brown eyes. All her features were lovely, but the expression of her face was more lovely still, so full of happiness and life, and yet so peaceful! It was altogether what you might call a radiant look that she had, as if a light within her shone out and met the sunshine outside her.

I suppose it was my acquaintance with Mr. Dallas, and what I had learnt from him, that gave me the power to see how

very beautiful this lady was. I looked almost involuntarily towards him, half in curiosity, half in fear, to see what impression this wonderful face and figure made on him as I led the ladies into the courtyard where he stood. To my great astonishment I saw his eyes light up with pleasure and recognition.

"This is indeed a pleasant surprise!" he exclaimed, coming forward quickly, and shaking hands in a very friendly manner. "Who would have thought of meeting you here?"

"It is very pleasant, certainly," said the elder lady as they shook hands; "but the surprise is your own private property. We knew you were here painting, and so we thought we would come and look you up."

"How very kind of you!" answered Mr. Dallas; "but where have you come from? I have been fancying you, Lady Doris, in town, paying and receiving visits, and dancing, and drinking afternoon-tea, and all the rest of it."

As he spoke he turned to the younger lady.

"Ah," she said gaily, "your imagination has played you false for once. Helen besought me to come here with her before I went to town, and my feelings of humanity couldn't resist her appeal. I didn't want her to die of ennui while my brother-in-law is devoting himself to trout-fishing."

"Oh," said Mr. Dallas, "then Colonel St. Quentin has come here for some fishing?"

"Yes," said the elder lady, whom her sister had called Helen; "my worthy better-half felt that he could not face six weeks or two months of London season without having a fortnight's seclusion in the wilderness; so we are staying at The Peacock at Bankwell, and, as Doris tells you, I begged her to come and keep me alive. The Duchess told us that you were here, so we felt we should not be quite alone on our desert island."

"And we shall have the privilege of a very private view, too; sha'n't we, Mr. Dallas?" said Lady Doris. "We shall be before even the people you admit to your studio."

"Yes," put in Lady Helen; "we shall intrude on you unmercifully, because, you know, you always like people about you when you are painting, and watching you will be a never-failing resource while the Colonel is whipping the Brend."

"I hope you will come a great deal to Mardon, Lady Helen," said Mr. Dallas; "you know you couldn't intrude on me,

that would be impossible. It will be delightful to have you."

He looked towards Lady Doris as he spoke.

"You are very polite, I am sure," said Lady Helen; "isn't he, Doris?"

"Very," said Lady Doris, smiling back at Mr. Dallas. "I suppose you are getting rather bored here all alone, aren't you? And we are, at least, a little reminder that society still exists."

"Oh, I'm not bored in the least," he said. "On the contrary, I'm enjoying myself immensely, and shall be very sorry when I have to go away. Your coming is just the last touch of pleasure—everything is quite perfect now."

"Well, certainly," said Lady Helen, "you haven't forgotten your pretty manners in the country. Where are you staying?"

"Oh, I have most delightful quarters at the farmhouse close by," he answered.

"Ah, I expect, Helen," said Lady Doris, looking at her sister, "that Mr. Dallas has been making great advances in the favour of the aborigines, and carrying all hearts by storm."

I didn't know what aborigines meant, but I concluded it stood for us at the farm, for Mr. Dallas said pleasantly:

"They have been very kind to me, not for any other reason, I believe, but because they are most hospitable people—eh, Miss Nancy?"

I thought it was very nice of him to speak so well of us, but I went so hot and red at being spoken to, that I couldn't find any answer to make before Lady Helen said:

"Well, I suppose as we've come to Mardon we must go through the house, or the poor, dear Duke will never forgive us, unless you can tell us enough, Mr. Dallas, to enable us to keep up a conversation with him without betraying ourselves."

It would be impossible for me to say how much Lady Helen impressed me by calling his grace "the poor, dear Duke;" it had never before entered my head that there could be anyone to whom the Duke was not the greatest and most unapproachable of human beings.

"Oh, you must see the house," answered Mr. Dallas. "Come along, it is well worth seeing, and perhaps you'll let me be showman."

"Oh, do, do!" they both said; and Lady Helen added, turning towards me where I stood a little way off; "I do not think we need trouble you, my good girl."

She spoke exactly as she would have spoken to a servant—with perfect courtesy, but still as if I were infinitely beneath her, which of course I was. I felt angry with her, but did not exactly know why.

"Oh yes," answered Mr. Dallas, "you will want Miss Nancy to manage that great bunch of keys—no trifles, I can tell you, when you are on the dark side of a door; and she'll tell you when there are four steps of stair, and when there are ten, at the end of a dusky passage, and when to turn to the right to avoid a trap-door in the floor, and when to bend to save your bonnets, not to mention your heads. I assure you I wouldn't be responsible to Colonel St. Quentin for your persons, Lady Helen, if you had no better guide than me. Now, Nancy!"

So I went with them, but Mr. Dallas didn't tell any of his wonderful stories, and the ladies didn't pay much attention to what they saw. They seemed to have so much to say to one another as they went along. Lady Helen talked the most; I dare say because she was older and the married one, but I noticed that when Mr. Dallas answered her, he addressed most of what he said to Lady Doris, and I saw that he looked at her a great deal, which did not surprise me, because she was so beautiful; nevertheless, I could not bear to see his eyes constantly upon her, as if he were watching for every word and every look from her.

Both ladies were very much charmed with the ballroom.

"My dear Doris," Lady Helen exclaimed, the moment she went into it, "what a length, and what a floor! What a room for dancing! The Duchess ought to give a ball here; it is a positive sin not to use such a room."

"Yes," said Lady Doris, "it's quite dreadful to think of the cooped-up places one dances in sometimes in London, while such a room as this is shut up and left. What a pity we can't pack it up and take it with us to town the week after next!"

"You should try and persuade the Duchess to give a ball here," said Mr. Dallas; "I don't suppose it would be impossible. It should be a fancy ball of Old England, and we would have no dances but minuets and sarabands, and gigues, and that kind of thing; it would be quite original."

"So it would," said Lady Doris; "but we should take an age to learn all those old dances, and by the time we knew

them we shouldn't find it very original to come down here and dance them."

"Now, Mr. Dallas," cried Lady Helen, "you must be good enough to show us what you have painted, and what you are painting, and what you are intending to paint; I am overcome with curiosity to see."

So he took them first into the garden and showed them the picture on the easel.

"Oh, you are painting the little châtelaine," exclaimed Lady Helen; "how very charming—how very picturesque! Really it is wonderful how an artistic rendering idealises that sort of figure. Look, Doris, how well the attitude carries out the expression of the face."

Lady Doris looked pleased with the picture.

"I think it is a very happy idea," she said; "I expect this picture will make quite a sensation."

It amazed me to hear them speak of my picture like that, as if I had nothing to do with it. I fancied Mr. Dallas was painting my likeness, and it had never entered my head that I was merely a figure in an artist's fancy.

"I'm glad you like it," he said, "for you really gave me the idea of this; don't you remember what you said when you saw my study for *A Broken Spell*?"

Lady Doris smiled, and Mr. Dallas went on:

"My other pictures, or rather sketches, are in the house; if you don't mind the trouble of coming to my sitting-room, I should like to hear what you think of them."

"We will come with pleasure," said Lady Helen, "and then you can tell your people not to get your dinner ready, for Colonel St. Quentin said we were to be sure and bring you back to eat some trout."

"Thank you," said Mr. Dallas, "I shall be very happy;" and I saw that Lady Doris looked very happy, too.

When they had fairly gone, and I could hear their voices no longer, a feeling of anger, which had taken possession of me the moment I saw Mr. Dallas's pleasure at the appearance of these ladies, quite overcame me, and I sat down on the terrace-steps, and cried bitterly.

Who were they, I thought, that they should come and take him away from me, and from his painting, and leave me all alone like I was before he came? Scarcely an hour of the day had passed, while he had been at Mardon, that I had not seen him, and talked with him; and now for

hours and hours I must think of him as talking to Lady Helen and looking at Lady Doris. Most likely I should not see him again till the next morning, and my tears flowed afresh at the thought of such a separation. And what was to prevent the same thing from happening over and over again? They would often come to Mardon, and they would often take him away with them. He had so identified himself with us in the last few weeks that it seemed to me as if he belonged to us entirely, and as if these old friends of his, who had known him intimately before I had heard of him, had come to do me a great injury, and to rob me. Then why had they spoken of my picture so—just as if I were a house, or a tree in a painting? That vexed me almost more than anything. And so I sat on, and cried, in the same place where I had felt so happy and elated in the early morning. It was the first time I had ever compared my feelings of the present and of the past together, and it seemed to me as if life could not contain a sharper contrast than lay between that May morning and afternoon.

That evening at supper, my father said :

"It seems quite dull without Mr. Dallas, don't it, Nancy? And you're all dumpish-like, too; are you pining after him?" and he laughed, as if it were quite a joke.

"She's been out of sorts all day," Aunt Libby said, by way of explanation. "Mr. Dallas found her asleep on the terrace-steps this morning, and she's eaten nothing. You'd better go to bed, child."

I didn't want twice telling to go upstairs, but when I got into my room, I didn't undress. I opened the window, and leant out to watch for Mr. Dallas. I had listened a long, long time when I heard his step coming quickly along the park. He was whistling softly as he came. When he was in the house I felt happier, and I went to bed to sleep off my first trouble, and to dream that Mr. Dallas told Lady Helen that he would rather never go out to dinner any more than make me so unhappy.

OUR SHINING RIVER.

VII.

THE charm of Abingdon, which overrides the first impression of its quiet, sleepy dulness, is in its unchangeableness, giving the visitor the impression of a town which for any odd or even number of centuries

has retained pretty much its present appearance. There has been growth; there has also been decay; and the regular recurrence of painting, whitewashing, repairing, scrubbing, and cleaning has made some minor alterations in the course of ages, while keeping the place up to the mark as a going concern. The great buildings of the abbey have, indeed, disappeared, but as you pass under the fine mediæval gateway into the quiet precinct, you think that things have not greatly changed since the days when King Henry the Eighth's commissioners, having driven away the monks and sold the materials of the church, left the rest of the place to gradual decay. For the bit of the abbey that is left, which is said to be the abbey dormitory, is just as the monks must have left it, allowing for natural decay. The custodian of the building is a civil young man in a white apron—the young man who bottles, and fines, and generally acts as cellarman to the wine-merchant who occupies the buildings—the cellars being the crypt and underground receptacles of the old abbey. And so by a creaking, decrepit, wooden stair—but the original wooden staircase, down which the sleepy monks would crawl, rubbing their eyes as the solemn-toned bell called them to primes or lauds—by this winding staircase, with its solid oaken newel, we reach the floor above. Partitions, joists have disappeared, and the flooring has crumbled in here and there, but the stout timbers, the strong roof, all that forms the skeleton of the old building, is still intact, and up the long passages into which all the dormitories opened, the wine-merchant's young man leads us with confident steps, and so brings us into an apartment of more pretensions, which he calls the abbot's parlour, with its noble ruined hearth, where the stain of the smoke still remains from the lordly faggots that once blazed in its hospitable, cavernous mouth. Outside, too, is the stone landing-place and balustrade—the carved wooden balusters still in their sockets, and leaning this way and that—that formed the perron of this chamber of honour, giving access to it from the outside. After lasting a few centuries without repair, the stone steps have given way, and we have to work our way back to the wooden staircase. To hazard a guess one would say that this whole building was the hospitium or guest-house, and the room at the end for guests of especial honour; but the legend of the abbot's parlour is more

compendious, and seems to focus the associations of the place.

From below, the whole is a pleasant bit of calm, restful colouring; the old timbers, the patches here and there of brickwork, toned with age and lichen growth, the grey, hoary stones, the ruined tracery; while the sentiment of the place culminates in the broken balustrade and its half-decayed woodwork. All about are stables, out-houses; nothing obtrusively new or in a bristling state of repair, but contributing rather to the general tender tone of slowly passing time with its gently corroding touch.

"Yes, there is a nice bit of colour about the place," says our young man with his head on one side, critically, "and a good many come to paint it. Why, there's a lady now at work upon it, only she hasn't come yet."

And with that our guide admits us to a private view of the lady's picture as it stands in a cartshed with its face to the wall. May the subject be a propitious one, and may we meet the canvas at a future time in a more dignified position—on the line at the Royal Academy, we will say!

And then on the other side of the old building we come to the rushing mill-stream, dashing along under the pleasant shade of noble chestnut-trees, and darting into the dark yawning archway of the old abbey mill. The mill is still running merrily, and the waters rush on with the same roar and swirl, the same mingling of deep shadows and brilliant points of light, as at any time during the ages past. The spirit of antiquity seems to hover in this cool, secluded nook. Even the Saxon monks seem at no great distance from you, and the clerks who came from Glastonbury and founded a school that was famous long before the Conquest, or those who year by year compiled the famous Chronicle of Abingdon.

Was the climate more sultry in those days of old? Were the summers longer, the autumnal frosts less rigorous? Nobody grows grapes about Abingdon now, and yet the monks had a vineyard here, it is pretty evident. For the name still attached to a now populous quarter of the little town, and the Vine, or the Vineyard, is repeated in signs of the taverns of the district. And beyond The Vineyard is an old farmhouse, a grey-stone, gabled building, adjoining which are some still more ancient ruins. But about the history of these ruins we could gather nothing,

except that it was believed there was an underground passage from hence to the abbey—the underground passage makes a great figure in all local traditions of abbeys and castles. But the farmhouse is now deserted and tenantless, and the stable-doors stand wide open, while there are no horses left to steal. Barns are empty, too, and cowsheds. There is not even a hen to cluck at the barn-door, or a goose to raise the alarm of strange intruders. Wherever we poke about we hear only the echo of our own voices, and there is nothing to tell the tale of all this desolation and loneliness except some tattered bills announcing a sale, unreserved, of live and dead stock, and some legal notices nailed to a door which nobody now cares to open. It is a picture of the desolation of to-day, more cruel and complete, perhaps, than any of old times.

As we take ship once more at Abingdon—the elder Pyecrofts are to meet us at Dorchester for luncheon, and we have made up our minds, we of the crew, to do or die this day, and reach Streatley, or its twin, Goring, before we finally lay down our sculls—as we are pushing off into the stream, Mr. Pyecroft dismisses us with a riddle. It is one he has culled from the black-letter of Dr. Plot, and is older any-how than Charles the Second's time :

The first letter of our forefadyr, a worker of wax, an I, and an N,
The colour of an Ass, and what have you then?

And we all agree that our merest tyros in conundrums could make a better riddle than that, and that if our ancestors could have been pleased with that sort of thing, they must have been vastly inferior in mental calibre to their supposed degenerate descendants.

There was nothing very exciting in our progress down the river, which for the first few miles runs through flat, fertile meadows, with no object more marked than a cow grazing on the bank, or a distant bridge. Claudia insists upon pulling a pair of sculls, and as we have only mademoiselle to pull along, with a long stretch, almost straight, of river before us, we make the boat move along. Our first stopping-place is Clifton Hampden, one of the pleasantest little places we have so far seen—quite unique, indeed, with its little rocky gorge, with church and buildings rising picturesquely out. But we all agree that the view from the road down the gorge, with a bright reach of water coming

into the prospect, and the pretty new bridge, is the cream of the whole. The little glen is so luxuriantly wild, the whole place is overgrown with flowers and creepers; and as we take to the water again, Claudia remembers a verse of Shenstone which seems to reproduce the scene in the indefinite, faded colours of the eighteenth century:

How sweetly smil'd the hill, the vale,
And all the landscape round!
The river gliding down the dale,
The hill with beeches crowned.

The hill with beeches crowned is now coming into prominent distinctness, after being with us more or less, at intervals, all the morning. Measured by map and compasses, our progress has been small since we passed Nuneham Courtenay yesterday, for it is just a mile and a half as the crow flies between Clifton Hampden and Nuneham, while we have pulled eight miles at least—of good, liberal measure, as Thames miles generally seem to be. And now the beech-crowned hill looks close at hand, although we have some miles to pull ere we reach Day's Lock, which lies at the foot of the hill which seems to block the further progress of the river. The hill which rises suddenly from the fertile plain, appears to be one and undivided till we approach its flank, when it is seen that it divides into two peaks, the farthest being the famed Sinodun, or, as pronounced, Swindon Hill, whose steep sides are terraced with strong earthworks, the work, perhaps, of some prehistoric people. The Danes have the credit of having raised these defences, in popular estimation; but more likely Sinodun was the hill city of some Celtic tribe, like one of those forts which gave so much trouble to Caesar in the Gallic war. On the opposite side of the river is a series of entrenchments cutting off a considerable area of fertile plain, and extending from the Thames above Day's Lock to the mouth of the Thame below Dorchester; all of which probably formed part of the same system of defence of which Sinodun Hill was the arx or citadel.

At the mouth of the Thame we land to explore the village of Dorchester, the little river itself being narrow and well choked with weeds; and presently we come in sight of the low, squat tower and the long roof-ridge of the quasi-cathedral church, the once great centre of the Christian church, among the Saxons of east and west. When we think that this is the mother-church to Lincoln, Lichfield, Win-

chester, and a host of minor sees, we cannot help wonder at the changes that time has wrought. For Dorchester, if not altogether the quietest village in the kingdom, cannot be far from the front rank in that respect, although its two neat little inns, and a butcher's shop with joints actually in evidence on the butcher's hooks, seem to indicate a certain amount of civilisation. Possibly it was market-day that gave rise to the display of animal food, but the Pyecrofts, who had arrived an hour or two before us, had certainly contrived to secure some mutton-chops, upon which we made a satisfactory luncheon.

The church is the one great feature of the place, its massive bulk dwarfing the little village street. A great, gaunt building that corresponds with what one would think is the Saxon ideal of a church, a huge barn, massive and weather-proof, but wanting every grace of architectural outline and detail. All this in outward aspect only, for within, the original bare shell has been encrusted with much meritorious work by Gilbert Scott and subsequent restorers. Broken columns, morsels of richly-carved capitals, fragments of ruined shrines, which have been brought to light of late years, and are piled up in different parts of the church, bear witness to the former richness of the interior of which a few centuries of neglect and iconoclasm made havoc. The floor, too, is paved with ancient monuments, with the matrices of fine brasses, the metal of which has long since disappeared; but there are also sundry antique effigies in tolerable preservation. A crusader whose contorted legs are probably due to the zeal of the local sculptor outrunning his anatomical studies—a fine figure of a knight of the Black Prince period—a bishop of the rigid early period, whose robes suggest the oriental origin of so many of our early churchmen, in days when east and west were really closer together than now, in spite of modern steam and telegraph, and when the hermit of the desert and the monk of the west felt a certain kinship and sympathy. Then in the chancel is to be seen the famous Jesse window, the tracery of the lights all issuing as a tree from the recumbent forms of the founder of the house of David, with kings and prophets of Israel sculptured among the branches.

But we have still the best of the day's journey before us, and cannot afford time

to linger any longer at Dorchester, although the place is well worth a little exploration; and so we take boat again, and descend pleasantly enough, aided by a rather sharp stream, till the long handsome bridge of Shillingford comes in sight, and, just beyond, The Swan appears snugly nestled on the hillside, where the range of down-like hills that issues in the massive bulwark of Sinodun, now gently dies away into the plain. A few miles lower down, after passing Benson Lock, we come to a mill, prettily situated, with a ferry close by, and here in the nook of the bank where we tie up, we discover—Claudia and I, for mademoiselle has fallen asleep after her luncheon, and still remains in blissful repose as we scramble up the bank—a pleasant seat, an oaken settle, ancient and weather-worn—evidently placed for the benefit of those who have to wait for the ferryman; while attached is a bell of curious antique shape, just such a bell, with its grip at the top for the hand, as might have been borne in procession centuries ago, when there was any cursing to be done with “bell, book, and candle.” And although there is nothing to be seen of the ferryman and his boat, yet there is the feeling that if the bell were rung loud enough we should see the ferry-boat creeping round just in the eddy of the mill-stream. Claudia, indeed, who possesses a vivid youthful imagination, suggests that the bell is placed there just as the horn is hung at the gate of the enchanted castle, and that to ring that bell might involve us in some curious adventure.

But adventures are for the adventurous, and neither of us feels in Quixotic mood to-day. Nor am I at all anxious to summon any witnesses to our tête-à-tête by the riverside. The heat of the day is over, and a pleasant breeze ripples the river, which glides smoothly by, “giving a gentle kiss to every sedge,” and the stillness has tempted forth a little brood of dabchicks, four or five little morsels of down, with the parent bird at the head of them, which dive and reappear, and dart about after flies, quite indifferent to our presence. Claudia has picked up an ox-eyed daisy, and is pulling it to pieces, flinging the petals one by one into the stream.

“Well,” I said, when the petals were all gone, “it is ‘loves me,’ of course.”

“Hush!” said Claudia. “There is a word that is sure to arouse mademoiselle.”

Mademoiselle, however, was still sleeping

very comfortably, embowered in rushes, so that there was no reason why the forbidden subject should be eschewed. Claudia half acknowledged that she was wondering whether somebody loved her, but not anybody in particular. She had only a vague kind of curiosity on the subject. And then I suggested, as in duty bound, how happy Charlwood would be could he think that he had been the subject of such a flattering sortilege.

“Let Charlwood speak for himself,” said Claudia proudly.

To which I rejoined that probably we should see Charlwood to-night, and that no doubt he would speak for himself.

“And then,” I said savagely, “when I had handed over the boat and its crew to the charge of its legitimate captain, I should retire to distant realms and misogynistic retirement.

“But why?” asked Claudia, in innocent wonder; “since Charlwood is your great friend, why should you give us up when he comes?”

“Only having held the chief place for all these pleasant days, how could I bear to see anybody else holding it?”

“Perhaps he won’t come, after all,” said Claudia with girlish insouciance. “Very likely he won’t. He is too much taken up with Rebecca, perhaps. Do you know Rebecca?” turning upon me with a sudden glow of interest.

I described the dark maiden’s charms, her speaking eyes, her lovely hair, her beautiful voice.

“She must be very charming,” said Claudia softly. “Perhaps, when you leave us, you will take Charlwood’s place by her side?”

Well, the notion had not occurred to me before, but, once suggested, it seemed a very promising one. If Rebecca would only smile upon me, halcyon days might come again. But Claudia took my careless words for earnest. She looked steadfastly away from me and up the river, but her eyes were suffused, her lip trembled. The temptation to seize the little brown hand that rested on the seat was too great to be resisted.

“Claudia, whether as captain or as crew, I should like always to sail with you.”

“Is that poetry?” asked Claudia, laughing nervously, while still a film of sorrow veiled her eyes. And she tried to withdraw her hand, but not impatiently.

“Claudia!” cried a voice from the river.

Mademoiselle had awoke, and was looking out anxiously in our direction. "Claudia, my child, how long have you been there?"

"Not very long," replied Claudia in a voice as unconcerned as she could make it.

"I must have shut my eyes for a little moment, I suppose. Well, and what are we stopping here for? It is very triste among these rushes."

"We are coming directly, ma'amselle," cried Claudia, and then she stooped and patted the quaint old bell that had wisely held its tongue all the time. "Good-bye, bell," she whispered; "you have brought us a little adventure after all."

As we pushed off into the main stream, Wallingford came in sight with its long, many-arched bridge, a bridge that spreads itself over land and water indiscriminately. And at Wallingford we met the elder Pyecrofts, who had been waiting for us some time, and had driven the distance from Dorchester in much quicker time than we had done it by water.

There is little at Wallingford to show for its former importance as a royal residence and stronghold. The town itself seems dull and lifeless beyond most country towns, without any picturesque features. Of the royal castle there only remain the earthworks of the keep, which are separated from the river by some low-lying meadows. This keep formed one corner of a strong enceinte that enclosed the town. Probably the river, or a channel of it, once ran directly under the castle-walls, and the low-lying meadows may have once formed the island where that King Stephen and Henry Plantagenet met, and concluded the treaty which settled the succession of the English crown. At a later date the castle belonged to the Black Prince, and here died his widow, the fair Joan of Kent, the much-loved and much-married Joan, whose ransom from the rebels of Kent, when in years she was quite an old woman, was a kiss graciously bestowed on the leader of the force. And Joan being a distinct human, and what is better, feminine, figure in the barren annals of the past, gives a certain interest to these grassy mounds.

Mr. Pyecroft, who has looked up the local history, tells us how Joan of Kent, making her last testament, on her death-bed in Wallingford Castle, gave to her son, King Richard the Second, her new bed of red velvet, embroidered with ostrich-feathers of silver, and leopards'-heads of

gold, with boughs and leaves proceeding from their mouths—probably the very bed from which the testament was penned; and we may think of joyous Joan as drawing her last breath in her damp, rheumatic old castle with all this tawdry grandeur about her; while to Thomas, Earl of Kent, and John Holand, her elder sons, she leaves each a bed of red camak—whatever that may be. As for the old tradition of the former existence of fourteen parish churches within the town, this probably owes its origin to some confusion between the boundary of the honour of Wallingford and of the town itself. Certainly, as far as Leland's evidence goes, who visited the town A.D. 1542, although he mentions the tradition, he found at that time only "three poore paroche chirches" within its limits. So that Tom Fairfax and his Puritans, who stormed and took the town at a later date, must be absolved of any wholesale destruction of churches.

Perhaps Wallingford would be more interesting if you could get a bird's-eye view of it from some neighbouring height, and trace its old earthworks and the line where its walls once stood; but all is flat as a table-cloth about there. Nor is the river very interesting, for some distance below, being rather a Dutch canal-like stream. And on the right bank of the river there rises a big, many-windowed brick building, that gives rise to the following colloquy, the speakers being the man in the boat, and an honest-looking countryman who is walking the towpath with his sweetheart:

"Can you tell me what that big building is—the red-brick one over yonder?"

"Whaar, that big building over theer?"

"Yes, exactly."

"Whaar, that big building, a' red-breek?"

"The very place."

"And yow waant to know whaat 'tis."

"That's just what I ask you."

"Why," with a burst of suppressed chuckles, as if the joke were too rich almost for utterance, "thaat building be the 'sylum."

But as the river approaches Moulsford, the scene becomes more inviting. The river is approaching a chain of hills, that seem to dispute its path. Our Thames has passed through the first part of its course—the smooth and uneventful part. Hitherto the river has skirted the hills it has met, and gone out of its way to avoid them, but now it seems to make its course

in spite of them ; entering their narrow defiles with a strong faith in its eventual destiny. Rushes and stumpy willows, too, give place to fine and well-grown timber, and with a background of these noble trees stands the little riverside inn, The Beetle and Wedge, with the ferry-boat moored in front of it, and a group of young fellows, mostly artists, enjoying their pipes in the pleasant evening air. But more surprising it is to find ourselves hailed from the shore. The Pyecrofts have stopped here on their drive. They are not given to stopping at roadside or riverside inns on their way, so that this proceeding of theirs is the more astonishing. But Mrs. Pyecroft makes signals that she particularly wants me to come ashore, and she carries me off as soon as I land.

"I have heard of them," cried Mrs. Pyecroft excitedly ; "Charlwood has been here this very day ; the whole party of them have been here all this day fishing, and they have only just gone back to their quarters, somewhere near to Basildon. We must find them at once."

Mrs. Pyecroft's excitement infected me to a certain extent, and put it in my mind to say what I should otherwise have held over for a time. Why should they—her parents—devote poor Claudia to one who did not care for her to begin with, and was never likely to make her happy ?

"Give her to me, Mrs. Pyecroft," I urged ; "I have longed for her from the first moment I saw her portrait. She will be happy with me."

"I wish I could," cried Mrs. Pyecroft, wringing her hands nervously. "I would rather trust the child with you than with Charlwood, but—oh, I cannot sacrifice her father ! There, I cannot say any more, but you must know that what you ask is impossible."

But I could not be brought to see the impossibility of the matter. There could be no valid reason, apart from the sentimental consideration of keeping the estate in the family name, which certainly ought not to outweigh the happiness of a number of human creatures ; apart from this, what could there be to render such an ill starred union necessary ?

"Oh," cried Mrs. Pyecroft, laying her hand appealingly on my arm, "can we trust you ? I think we can ; and it will be a great relief to me, for all the burden is upon my shoulders."

Surely Mrs. Pyecroft could trust me, since it was my great ambition to become

a member of her family. Claudia's mother might rely upon all that my skill could do to help her.

"Then I will tell you our story," said Mrs. Pyecroft, "beginning with my uncle Charlwood, who made a large fortune in Bristol and left all his money to my eldest child—for Charlwood's father had offended him just before his death. Now, at that time, we had a son, who was too much like Charlwood, poor boy ! good-hearted, but extravagant and dissipated. He knew that this fortune of my uncle's was coming to him, and he was beyond our control. From bad, my poor boy went to worse, and in one mad hour he forged the name of a friend to bills for a large amount. The bills were coming due ; my poor boy saw his name dishonoured, himself spending his best years in prison. He came to me, and told me everything. And I made his father save him. But this he could only do by risking his own good name. A large part of Uncle Charlwood's trust was invested in house-property ; this was readily disposed of, the other trustee signing his name unsuspectingly to the transfer. In a few months my son would come of age, and could acquit his father of all responsibility. Before those months had elapsed, my poor, unfortunate son was dead. Never has poor Ernest been able to make up the deficiency ; in his efforts, he has, I fear, still further embarrassed himself. Still, the money is Claudia's, that is, if she lives to twenty-one. And there would be no real danger, but for the possibility of interfering friends. I am told that if the estate were thrown into Chancery, my poor husband and the other trustee, Mr. Boothby, might be made to refund, at once, all that money, and that poor Ernest might be sent to prison till it is paid. And there is one unfortunate circumstance. Mr. Thomas has purchased the house-property, and, although his title is quite good, I am told he is always poking about and asking questions. Now, if ever by evil chance he and Mr. Boothby should come together——"

I groaned out aloud :

"Why, my dear Mrs. Pyecroft, the evil you dread has actually come to pass. Mr. Boothby and old Thomas are hand and glove together at this moment."

"Then my poor husband, my wretched Ernest, is undone !" cried Mrs. Pyecroft wildly. "Oh, Mr. Penrice, save him—save him for me and his child, and you shall have Claudia—you shall have anything—only save him !"

AFTER LONG YEARS.

CHAPTER IV.

THE weeks that elapsed between the despatch of the letter in which Stephen Ellerton made his formal demand to Colonel Hamilton for his daughter's hand, and the arrival of the latter's reply, were the most trying the young man had as yet experienced. Between his aunt and himself there had fallen upon the subject which was uppermost in his thoughts a dead silence ; and, do what he would, he could not prevent his fears getting the better of his hopes, when he recalled their conversation. It was not as though, as he put it to himself in the homely Saxon which came most readily to his lips, he had been "worth having." There was so little, if anything, to be urged for him as a suitor, that it was hard to have anything positive against him. The most hopeful element was contained in the confidence Mary herself seemed to feel in her father's indulgence, and, even when he took heart at this, Steenie could not but reflect that she knew less than he did, and that he had himself placed no less reliance upon his aunt.

He ran up to town ; though he would have avoided it if he could, eager as he was to see Mary herself, until he felt a greater certainty of his ground. But having been asked, he could not refuse to go, and very kind and friendly everybody at The Cedars was to him. There seemed to be a little astonishment, not at Mary's precipitancy, for precipitate she could scarcely be said to have been, but at the fact that she should have allowed herself to be, as it were, taken by storm.

"I was taken aback when I heard of it, I must say," Mrs. Lindsay observed, laughing. "But I don't know why I should have been. Mary is never long in making up her mind about anything or anybody."

Mary had, it appeared to Steenie, very much her own way with all of them. She was brighter and quicker, and had more ideas of her own, than the rest of the young ones. She had "character," as the phrase goes, and a will of her own to boot, and she had had things pretty well her own way always. Still they had not spoiled her ; she had had to give and take ; and, it must be added, her way was not, as a rule, a wicked way. Her impulses were good, if they were strong, and there was no guile in her.

She could not run down to West Saxford to see Miss Dunscombe, as she had made

Steenie run up to town to see her cousins, for the very good reason that she was not asked.

"Besides, my dear, we don't know yet what your father will say," Mrs. Lindsay mildly reminded her.

"What can he say?" she retorted. "He told me his one wish was to see me happy, and he spoke of my marrying. He could not expect to keep me to himself, he said. And papa does not think money is everything, any more than you do. He is sure to be satisfied."

"One can never be sure of anything in this world," the older woman replied gravely ; but she did not expect anything worse than a conditional acceptance. To her, as well as to Mary, therefore, the Colonel's letter, when it did arrive, conveyed a shock ; for in it he begged his daughter quietly but earnestly to put the thought of Stephen Ellerton on one side.

"I have nothing," he wrote, "to urge against him personally ; I do not know him, and the letter he has done me the honour to write is gentlemanly and straightforward ; but I have reasons for objecting strongly to a connection between the families, and you will take my word for it that these reasons are good and sufficient. Heaven knows I would not thwart you for any caprice of my own ; but I am satisfied that no happiness would accrue to either party from such a marriage."

"What does he mean, Aunt Emma ? What can be the matter with the family, and what can he have known of them ?" Mary Hamilton asked with a pale, set face, as she sat facing her kinswoman ; the letter, which the latter had just returned to her, lying in her lap.

To her the kindly woman who had been a second mother to her was always "aunt."

"My dear, how can I say ? Insanity, perhaps. There were people, you know, who thought that the tragedy at West Saxford was not murder at all, but suicide. It is possible your father may be one of them."

"You did not think so, and Uncle Hugh said the other night it was as plain a case of murder as could be."

"I only said, dear, there were those who did think so. How can I tell what your father means ? There is only one thing, Mary, I think, we may be sure of—his reasons are good and sufficient."

"I have no doubt he thinks them so," Mary said. "But I would rather he had given them. What has he written to

Steenie, I wonder ; and what will he do ? Come and tell me he is not to be allowed to have me, or—come and beg me to run away with him ? ”

She tried to laugh, but failed miserably ; and the tears, in spite of her, rose into her eyes.

“ I was so happy,” she said, “ and I felt so sure. It seems scarcely fair to ask us to give each other up, without saying why.”

“ There are things, dear child, which it is kinder to leave unsaid,” Mrs. Lindsay suggested gently.

“ Your mind keeps running on the one thing, Aunt Emma,” Mary replied with some impatience. “ And you will never make me believe there is any more tendency to that in Steenie and his people than there is in me and mine.”

The evening brought a distracted little letter from Steenie. He had had his dismissal in very laconic terms, and the next day he took a holiday and came up to The Cedars. He had made up his mind there should be no mystery or misunderstanding between him and Mary—that if they were to be kept apart, it should not be in any degree by their own instrumentality.

“ Your father and my aunt were engaged to each other,” he told her to her great astonishment, “ and she considers your father treated her badly, in what way I cannot make out ; but from the first she seemed sure there would be an objection.”

“ I don’t believe papa ever behaved badly to anybody, least of all to a woman,” the girl exclaimed warmly. “ Your aunt must be labouring under a delusion.”

Her own words brought back to her memory Mrs. Lindsay’s suggestion of the day before.

“ There is no other reason ? ” she queried. “ Oh, Steenie, be candid with me ! It will be better for us both. There is no other reason whatever—there is nothing else associated in papa’s mind with your family ? ”

“ On my word of honour, to the best of my belief, nothing,” he answered readily ; “ what should there be ? ”

For all her answer, she put her hand in his.

“ I take your word for it,” she said ; “ and that being all there is to come between us, I will do as you wish. I will wait for my father’s consent until I see him. I cannot ask you to come and see me, and I must not write to you, but I shall wait for you just the same, until I hear you, on your part, have grown tired

of waiting. There is no fear of me ; I have the patience and the obstinacy of a mule ! ”

Miss Dunscombe took outwardly with great calmness the announcement of the decision at which her nephew and the girl to whom he had so warmly attached himself, had arrived. She had “ said her say,” and she was not a woman to waste words ; but she did feel, and feel bitterly, that Steenie had made her will and wish of no account in the matter. She would have resented it still more, had she not been so sure of the impotence of the defiance he was proclaiming. It was not in her nature to trample upon a fallen enemy, and already in her mind’s eye she saw him in the dust, for of Colonel Hamilton’s line of conduct who could entertain a doubt ?

As far as she could, therefore, she studiously ignored the difference which had taken place in their relations with each other. Still, do what she would, nothing could bridge over the gulf which lay between them. What possible intercourse, worthy of the name, can remain to people when the subject which lies nearest to the heart of one of them is forbidden ground to the other ? The increased isolation in which he found himself had the effect which might have been anticipated on the young man. He went out more and stayed out longer, from which it is not to be inferred that he fell into evil courses, that he drank, gambled, or otherwise disgraced himself, for he did nothing of the kind. He simply became more and more independent of his aunt, and estranged from her, and she, in spite of herself, from him. People noticed it, of course—as they notice everything, particularly that which is not to their neighbour’s credit—and invented various explanations of it, none of which touched the truth. That which took the taste of West Saxford most decidedly had for its basis Nellie Bevan’s marriage. Young Ellerton, they said, had put a good face upon it at the time, but it had unsettled him. Nor was the public mind altogether satisfied, as time went on, as to Nellie herself. The girl had grown grave since her return home in her new character, and even her husband struck his old associates as being, as some of them expressed it, “ down in the mouth.” Mr. Bevan’s health was understood to continue unsatisfactory, and the young couple’s surroundings were possibly, on that account, less cheerful than they should have been.

Steenie did not see much of them.

Mr. Bevan, though he still came to the office, did not stay late, and he very rarely expressed a wish to see the young man at his own house. Indeed, that avoidance of himself which the latter imagined he had observed some time since, had in no wise diminished ; but Steenie was the less aggrieved by it, as he saw indications of a growing disposition to shun the society of others, no less than of himself, on the part of the old lawyer. His ill-health seemed to have made him morose and moody, and it would appear that even Nellie was powerless to counteract the effect of it.

Time seems proverbially leaden-footed to those who wait ; but even to them, after a certain space, it ceases to drag as heavily as at first, and the last nine months or so of Steenie's probation were apparently swifter in their flight than the first. Mary Hamilton had held it no part of her duty to keep him in utter ignorance of her well-being and whereabouts. One can send a paper now and again, even if one may not meet or write, and of these innocent, if prosaic, tokens of remembrance there had been a constant interchange from the first. I am not one of those who think that love, in the hearts of most of us, will live without any sustenance whatever, but I am satisfied that it can be kept not merely alive, but thriving, upon the most pitiful fragments.

It was in this way that things went on until within three months, or thereabouts, of Colonel Hamilton's return, when Miss Dunscombe suddenly called her nephew's attention to herself by falling ill. She was a great gardener, and never at any time over-careful of herself, and she contrived, by dint of exposing herself with her usual recklessness to the March winds, to take cold, a circumstance to which, after her accustomed fashion, she attached very little importance. It resulted, however, for once, in a sharp attack of congestion of the lungs, and for a few days there was, in the professional phrase, grave cause for anxiety.

And Steenie was anxious—anxious and remorseful both. She had been devoted to him all her life, and he had not taken her into his confidence, as she had deserved to be taken. He had kept her in the dark on both occasions when the question had been of his future—first to suit the convenience of one girl, then that of another—and now he was going his own way,

quite irrespective of her. He felt guilty and miserable enough during those hours in which her life hung, as it were, in the balance. But scarcely to save it could he now have broken faith with the girl who had stood by him so patiently and pluckily. It was sweet to the poor, hungry soul, starving in silence for more love than it would ever get down here, to see that he cared so much, and perhaps it helped her, more than the doctors thought, to get well ; but it made it harder to settle down into the old ways—ways in which Steenie took nowadays so small a share—afterwards. She grew restless and irritable in her convalescence, and when it was suggested that she should go away for a time for change of air and scene, she fell into the idea with a readiness which surprised him. He was still more surprised when she told him suddenly one day that she had consented to let the house for the summer.

"Mrs. Stracey has a friend for whom it would be the very thing—a City man with a delicate wife, who is ordered change and quiet, anywhere but at the sea, and she has written to him to come and see it," Miss Dunscombe informed her nephew. "They are quiet people, without children, and would take care of it. I told her you would retain your bedroom, and, for the rest, you will find a bachelor life for a time no trial."

The young man could scarcely believe his ears. She had, indeed, grasped, more completely than he had supposed possible, his complete independence of her, or she would never have suggested turning him adrift like this.

"It will save trouble in many ways," she vouchsafed to add. "I shall send Wilson home on board-wages, and take Milly with me. Jim they will be glad of in the garden, but they will bring their own servants, and I shall have no worry as to how things are going on in my absence."

"And may I ask for how long you propose making this arrangement ?" Steenie asked stiffly.

"For three months certain—for longer if they wish it," she replied coolly.

The next day, the gentleman in question—a London stockbroker, of the name of Burroughes—came down and saw the house, and on the 1st of May Miss Dunscombe gave him possession, and took her own departure for the seaside.

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